

Rob Quist Testimony for Montana Arts Council Budget Hearing

Tuesday, January 13, 2009 at 8 a.m.

Room 472, State Capitol

Good morning Mr. Chairman and members of the committee. For the record, my name is Rob Quist from Kalispell, Montana.

The Montana Arts Council's grants and programs are designed to produce real public value for the people of Montana. One of the currencies of this value is told through stories about the real impact of the arts council's programs. Here are some stories we thought you'd enjoy hearing:

The Montana Artists in the Schools and Communities serves about one out of every five K-12 students in the state each year and reaches almost 9 out of every 10 counties in Montana. It has impressive impacts, not measured through numbers or charts:

A 5th grader from Gallatin Gateway School experienced a year-long visual arts residency in his school.

He said, "Art is something that passes on through a community, boosting our spirits and our thinking. Our community needs art like everything. You can't be a loner in the art world. Art means sticking together."

The arts council also receives evaluations from the artists involved in residencies. Here is an excerpt from an artist after a special project where teachers were mentored in their classrooms on the basic skills and knowledge of theatre and how to integrate it with other subjects:

"Some teachers expressed student retention of academic ideas was much better when presented in a theatrical way, and that students were consistently enthused when working with theatre in the classroom. Other teachers expressed that they could see differences between groups/classes who were involved in this program and those who were not. Stronger associative skills, willingness to take risks, better physical and vocal projection, and more confidence were traits exhibited by many students involved."

From a 3rd grade teacher to the artists after a visual art residency:

"What benefited my students the most was the chance to work with artists — people besides me. Also, how exciting the lessons were and how important and like artists you made them feel. I have always been uptight about art and my ability to make it... Art expands creativity, teaches things in a different way. Great lessons! Well planned and organized. Always moving — no dead time. Thought provoking."

One of the most descriptive responses we've received was from a 5th grader in Helena, following a week-long dance residency:

"When I heard that were doing dances, I was not happy. Now I like it a lot. I never thought it was so fun. It's like a big secret that has been wanting to explode. Now that it has, I love dancing!"

And finally, a statement from a Middle School teacher after a two-week poetry residency:

"Another student who refused to complete most of her work, answer any questions, or do any homework, came alive during poetry. She wrote two poems for every class assignment and is still bringing in poems for me to read. Poetry has given her success and she will now pass 7th grade. Poetry has shown her how to be a successful student."

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The arts council's other major grant program is Public Value Partnerships. The arts council captures the impact of these organizations' work by asking them to answer the question, "If a legislator asked you, "What is the public value of the work your organization is doing in return for funding from the state of Montana." Here are some of their stories:

From the Venture Theater in Billings

There is one special young man that stands out in to the staff and teachers of Venture Theatre. We first met this student through our Venture Into Schools program. This student comes from a low-income family and neighborhood and has been given a scholarship to attend summer theatre school for the last two years. His words best describe how the programming at Venture Theatre has influenced his life: "This program has given me the courage to present myself to others. I have learned so much, through acting, about myself, and I have gotten to meet kids from other schools that I would have probably never met. It's nice because no one cares where you are from at Venture. South Side, West End, we are all the same here."

From the Great Falls Symphony

A number of entities who are involved in promoting Great Falls and recruiting to promote the local job market such as the Great Falls Development Authority, Benefis Healthcare, the Great Falls Clinic, the Downtown Business Improvement District, the Chamber of Commerce, etc., have all contacted "us" emphasizing how important the arts are as a crucial component of quality of life for many residents of Great Falls and the surrounding area. We hear over and over, that people "would not want to live here if it were not for the cultural opportunities afforded by the

Symphony.” Our brochures and promotional materials are included in promotional packets, and businesses bring clients considering locating in this region to concerts. This acknowledgement of the connection between cultural environment and economic development speaks directly a perceived return on investing in the symphony.

Art Mobile, a state-wide visual arts education touring program, invited Representative Pat Ingraham on April 12, 2008 to visit Thompson Falls Elementary School to see the program.

Her comments about program: “When you are spending the people’s money it is nice to know where it’s going, and if it is a good program worth the money we are putting into it. I was impressed with the AMM program. The art is local Montana artist’s art; the kids enjoyed it immensely and were able to see all kinds of art. The young woman [Salley Williamson] did a good job and the kids had questions. It is a good exposure for learning and an exposure to the culture in Montana. We have many talented people and the Art Mobile offers a good exposure for the schools. It’s worthy of state investment; educating children to more of what is outside of Thompson Falls, you don’t have to leave the country or the state to see how others use their gifts. It expands horizons.”

Our final story, from the Yellowstone Art Museum in Billings

The Yellowstone Art Museum has many stories of its successes. It is very easy to list the numbers of exhibitions, the attendance at special events, the number of donations and other facts and figures. However, the greatest success of the Museum isn’t necessarily in the raw data but in the individual lives that are touched through our work, especially the YAM’s educational outreach programs. The following is a description of just one child who has participated in our school outreach program. There are hundreds of inspirational stories that we can share from the participants in our programs.

There is a young student at Crow Agency who has been blind from birth. With the individual help from his full-time teacher, Lois Rides Horse, he participated in the classroom with the other students during art sessions. He was given the same opportunities as the other students with added tactile experiences. He enjoyed being included with the students, gaining their respect when he participated in the classroom discussions; such as the temperature of color and emotional responses to the mask making project. He enjoyed writing about art in Braille and loved sharing with the other students. When the class drew their self-portraits, he formed his in clay. The exercise proved to be an excellent study in self awareness. He paid much attention to every detail of his face including eye balls and tongue. He was proud of his creation and entered it in the Crow Indian Days Arts and Crafts Show, where he received a cash award for first place in sculpture.

Each student wrote a story about their mask to accompany the assignment. He typed his in Braille and submitted it. His story follows:

My Face

My face has a nose, a mouth, eyes, cheeks and a heart over the lips. I made it even though I can’t see. The elk teeth block everything. I can see with my hands, even my ears. There are

different shapes of thoughts all over my face. My favorite is the heart over the lips. I have to talk nice. The feathers are dancing on my head.